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ABSTRACT

The dramatic increase in the incidence of eating disorders among young women indicates a growing need for health education. However, women's magazines that perpetuate images of beauty and thinness may reinforce the disorders. Researchers have looked for strategies that encourage participation in society by those who partake of American media. One researcher has proposed giving information to people that helps them act on attitudes they already have ("mobilizing information" or "MI"), and giving information intended to energize participation on behalf of an attitude embedded in the message itself ("mobilizing message" or "MM"). In a study, content analysis was conducted on 51 eating disorder articles published in popular women's magazines during the 1980s. Most of the articles contained MM, while fewer than half included MI. Mobilizing messages tended to take the form of general advice, with no specifics. The mobilizing information stressed that sufferers were not alone and that help was available; specifics were given. Of articles using MM and MI, most were identificational. A few were tactical. No locational MI appeared. Editors' attitudes about articles with mobilizing information bear investigation and systematic study, as does the impact of advertising, editorials, and maintaining editorial objectivity. (Twenty-six references are attached.) (SG)

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The Link Between Mobilizing Information and Service Journalism as Applied to Wommen's Magazine Coverage of Eating Disorders

by Barbara Straus Reed

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The Link Between Mobilizing Information and Service Journalism as Applied to Women's Magazine Coverage of Eating Disorders

Introduction:

Problems with eating are second only to concerns about drinking among women responding to a *Ms.* survey.[1] When compulsive overeating gets out of hand, it is comparable to alcoholism or drug abuse. One in six dies.

Eating disorders, which afflict millions, threatening their health and sometimes their lives, are most successfully treated when detected in their early stages. Yet experts say neither families nor physicians are sufficiently alert to early signs of serious eating problems. Moreover, even when a parent or physician suspects someone has an eating disorder and confronts the family member or patient, a denial is often too readily accepted.

Every single diet results in a binge.[2] "It doesn't matter what you're on. Everyone who is involved with them knows they don't work."[3] Yet, most American women diet. Moreover, 77 percent of women think they are overweight; only 25 percent are.[4] It is estimated that 70 to 90 percent of American women are obsessed with their bodies.[5] Surveys show that nearly half of normal-weight women

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[1] Lindsy Van Gelder et al., "Cross-Addiction: Surprising Results of the *Ms.* Survey," *Ms.*, February 1987, pp. 45 ff.

[2] Jane R. Hirschmann and Carol H. Munter, *Overcoming Overeating* (New York: Fawcett, 1989).

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

[4] Interview, Dr. Charles A. Murkofsky, director of the Eating Disorder Program, Gracie Square Hospital, New York, August 1989. Incidentally, he noted that the first diet book was published after the turn of the century.

[5] Interview, Dr. David Greenfield, medical director, Yale-New Haven Hospital Adolescent and Young Adult Treatment Unit, November 1989. He defines

are on a diet, that one in six *underweight* women are, too. Being thin, rather than being intelligent or industrious or generous or even healthy, is the quality most prized by many women today.

Bulimics are often able to hide their problem for years, because they eat normally in public, binge and purge in secret and keep normal weight even while the disorder wreaks havoc with their bodies. More than 5 percent of adult females are bulimics.[6] Bulimics turn to food for solace. Many women overeat when they are angry, bored, depressed, lonely and anxious.[7]

The problem is also very common among college women and fairly common among older women with powerful jobs and socially demanding lives.[8] In fact, one writer asserted that at least half the women on college campuses had some kind of eating disorder.[9] Even conservative estimates run from 19 to 26 percent of college women.[10] Bulimics can consume huge numbers of calories, 5,000 or

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"obsession" as spending your waking thoughts and entire daily routine on losing weight.

6 Interview, Dr. William Davis, director, Center For The Study Of Anorexia, New York, August 1989. He also states that anorexia in numbers pales compared to bulimia.

7 Van Gelder, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

8 Katherine A. Halmi, J.R. Falk, and E. Schwartz, "Binge-eating and vomiting: A survey of a college population," *Psychological Medicine*, vol. 11, 1981, pp. 697-706.

9 Susan Squire, "Is the Binge-Purge Cycle Catching?" *Ms. Magazine*, October 1983, pp. 41-46. Linda Lazier-Smith, Ph.D., notes that 35-60 percent of college women are preoccupied with food, to the point that it is disabling. Lazier-Smith interview, March 1990.

10 Ronald I. Pyle, Peter A. Halvorson, Patricia A. Neuman, et al., "The increasing prevalence of bulimia in freshman college students," *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, vol. 5, 1986, pp.631-647; David M. Zuckerman, Allen Colby, Noah C. Ware, et al., "The prevalence of bulimia among college students," *American Journal of Public Health*, vol.76, 1986, pp. 1135-1137. William J. Swift, "Assessment of the Bulimic Patient," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 55, 1985, p. 384.

more, at a time, compulsively eating nutritionally undesirable foods. The binge is then followed by induced vomiting, abuse of laxatives or diuretics, enemas, fasting, or an overly strenuous and unpleasurable amount of exercise. A serious bulimic can purge 40-50 times a day, although 10-20 times daily is more common.[11] Bulimia means insatiable appetite.

Anorexia nervosa, literally nervous loss of appetite, is characterized by preoccupation with food, fear of fat, distorted body image, severe emaciation, and a relentless pursuit of thinness and vomiting or purging without binge.[12] It was diagnosed in France and England in the 1870s.

A third kind of disorder has been christened bulimarexia.[13] It too involves periodic bingeing, but the anorexic is concerned with achieving extreme thinness while the bulimarexic has a fear of getting fat. Yet the bulimarexic may eat normally most of the time, but she also binges on occasion. She will simply not eat for a day or two.

Slimness has begun to become fashionable; that was not true throughout history. Changing norms in our society, especially toward thinness for women, have created a "cult for dieting."[14] Indeed, the March 1989 issue of *Self* magazine, the model Stephanie Seymour, 5'10" and 127 pounds, was described as being "perfect." Miss America winners have been as thin or thinner than all the other

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[11] Murkofsky interview, *op. cit.*

[12] Nancy E. Mintz, "Bulimia: A New Perspective," *Clinical Social Work Journal*, vol. 10, 1982, p. 290.

[13] Marlene Boskind-White and William C. White, Jr., *Bulimarexia*, second edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987).

[14] Suzanne Abraham and Derek Llewellyn-Jones, *Eating Disorders: The Facts*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 1; Christian S. Crandall, "Social Contagion of Binging," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 55, 1988, p. 588.

contestants. Many could have been candidates for hospitalization.[15] Indeed, one researcher has said that the current standard for slimness for women is not held for men; moreover, the standard is slimmer now than in the past. According to Orbach, the "right size" for women has been decreasing yearly since 1965.[16]

The dramatic increase in the incidence of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia among young women indicates a growing need for health education.[17] Popular women's and young women's magazines have been discussing diet, eating habits and eating disorders. However, many sources report that magazines for women perpetuate images of beauty and thinness that may reinforce both anorexia nervosa and bulimia.[18] (Yet, it is important to recognize that magazines do not cause or originate such ideas.)

Researchers have looked for strategies that will encourage participation in society by those who partake of American media.[19] One adherent who has gained credence of a kind has advocated

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15 Greenfield interview, *op. cit.*

16 Susie Orbach, *Fat Is a Feminist Issue*, (New York: Berkley Books, 1982).

17 M. Elizabeth Collins, "Education for Healthy Body Weight: Helping Adolescents Balance the Cultural Pressure for Thinness," *Journal of School Health*, vol. 58, 1988, p. 227-228.

18 See for example, a dissertation by Linda Lazier-Smith, Indiana University, 1988, on sexist images. She updates the work of Suzanne Pingree and Robert Hawkins, and Erving Goffman to determine are the media still, according to Jean Kilbourne's film, "Killing Us Softly." She finds they are, that advertising is more sexist than 15 years ago.

19 Reese found that 52% of 600 people surveyed thought that information is essential to every facet of society and gives the public greater control over their lives. Stephen D. Reese, "Social Correlates of Public Attitude Toward New Communication Technology," *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 63, pp. 675-82. Ana Barbic, "Participation or Escape? *Journal of Communication* , vol. 26, 1976, pp. 36-42.; Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste, and Organized Social Action," in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, ed. Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts, rev. ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 554-78.

giving information to people that helps them act on attitudes they already have.[20] Lemert terms this "mobilizing information."

This paper will apply Lemert's concepts to the subject of eating disorders as carried by magazines for young and other women. This paper is intended to pose, develop and partially test some ideas about this kind of necessary information. The paper will also link mobilizing information to service journalism, the former being a term known to many scholars of the field, the latter relatively unknown.

Definitions:

Lemert also introduces another term called mobilizing message. This is "intended to energize participation on behalf of some policy, preference or attitude that is embedded in the message itself."[21] It is important to distinguish between mobilizing messages and mobilizing information. A mobilizing message (MM) encourages participation based on an attitude present in the actual message. It would be directed only at attitudes toward participation, whereas mobilizing information (MI) is a specific piece of information which helps the reader act on an attitude. It may be a name, an address, a tip, even a listing. "The use to which it is put depends on many things that are not in the MI itself."[22]

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[20] James B. Lemert, *Does Mass Communication Change Public Opinion After All?* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981); Lemert, and Roxana J. Cook, "Mobilizing Information in Broadcast Editorials and 'Free Speech' Messages," *Journal of Broadcasting*, vol. 26, 1981; Lemert, Barry N. Mitzman, et al., "Journalists and Mobilizing Information," *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 54, 1977, pp. 721-726; Lemert, and Jerome P. Larkin, "Some Reasons Why Mobilizing Information Fails to be in Letters to the Editor," *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 56, pp. 504-512; Lemert and Marguerite Gemson Ashman, "Extent of Mobilizing Information in Opinion and News Magazines," *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 60, pp. 657-662.

[21] *Ibid., Does Mass Communication Change Public Opinion After All?* p. 131.

[22] *Ibid.*

Three types of MI are in the media; they cut across topics and groupings of content.[23] The first is **locational MI**, which provides information about time and place for activity. This would include newspaper rather than magazine stories about forthcoming meetings of people with eating disorders; pleas for charitable help, listings, etc. The second is **identificational MI**, involving both names and enough locational MI to enable persons to recognize and/or contact the person, groups or entity identified. This would include individuals' or groups' names, addresses, phone numbers; names and positions in easily locatable organizations (for example, Dr. Hilde Bruch, nutrition department, Harvard University). The third is **tactical MI**, which makes available explicit and implicit behavioral models. Examples of subtypes here include health tips, eating techniques, successful and unsuccessful *modus operandi* in addictions, and tactics used in successful and unsuccessful attempts to bring the disorder under control, health food movements, and so on. Thus, Lemert is concerned about the achievement of attitude change.

Some in the magazine business would call Lemert's "mobilizing information" "service journalism." Service journalism is of importance today in a world where information is a priority. Using service journalism is but one more effective strategy for dealing with the audience. Service journalism is practical, useful material that leads the reader to take action. Some magazines bundle it to a "News you can use"column.[24] The action may be entered into at once, or delayed. Service journalism tries to meet the needs of readers. It is "action-oriented information directed at the interests and concerns of the audience...to help lead a better life."[25] Thus, it shares much of the meaning of "mobilizing information."

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[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 121 ff.

[24] See *Business Week's* Personal Business column or *U.S. News & World Report*, for example.

[25] Marjorie Mocling, "Just What Is Service Journalism," *Dialogue*, p. 12.

Literature Review:

Two studies of note relate advertising to eating disorders. Gagnard reviewed 961 half-page or larger ads in three women's magazines in 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1984.[26] She found most models to be young, white and female. The use of thin models increased each decade since 1950, reaching 46 percent in the 1980s, while the use of overweight and obese models decreased from 12 percent in 1950 to 3 percent in 1984. Lazier-Smith surveyed three groups of women to elicit attitudes on physical attractiveness, such as an "ideal body shape" and media influences in promoting it. Most agreed the ideal woman was a size seven.[27]

Additionally, researchers have found the number of articles about diet appearing in popular women's magazines grew significantly over a 20-year period.[28] Gormley asserts that "one of the more routine--and more significant--powers of the mass media is their ability to influence the public's perception of the relative importance of various issues."[29]

Milbrath "strongly suggests that there is a better chance of achieving dramatic attitude changing effects when the topic of the communication is new to a recipient, because he or she had had little or no previous need to develop defenses for any previous attitudes

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[26] Alice Gagnard, "From Feast to Famine: Depiction of Ideal Body Type in Magazine Advertising, 1950-1884," in Proceedings of the American Academy of Advertising, 1986.

[27] Linda Lazier-Smith, "Demographics Vs. Demigoddesses: a New 'Genderation' of women in Advertising," paper presented to Advertising Division, AEJMC, Washington, D.C., 1989.

[28] Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 227; Grant, et al. on a thinner ideal.

[29] William T. Gormley, Jr., *Effects of Newspaper-Television Cross-Ownership on News Homogeneity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1976, p. 4.

toward the topic."[30] A lack of knowledge about a specific topic can have many bases, including age, lack of proper education and/or lack of proper informational resources due to socioeconomic status. Therefore, based on this information, it becomes vital to conduct related research about attitude achieving information, and to examine material in terms of audience age. Magazines in this study are in two categories: First, young women's (YW), aimed at an adolescent/teen age audience; and second, women's (W), aimed at a more adult audience.

Two papers on service journalism have materialized over the past two years; both are by the same author. Jeffers studied readers of the *Angus Journal*, an association magazine, and found readers preferred and read more service content than either human interest or association-related content. Still, no uniform package could be devised, so that he included writing strategies of various kinds as ways for the editor to satisfy the diverse information needs of association members.[31] Jeffers also wrote about the strengths of service journalism for the magazine curriculum. He notes the attention niche marketers have received and their realization to use service journalism to help secure their niches.[32]

Basic research questions follow, then, pertaining to what information regarding eating disorders do magazines for women feel their readers should be thinking about. Is the emphasis on simple presentation of facts and biographical accounts of women who have

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30 *Ibid.*, p. 120. Lemert cites Lester W. Milbrath, *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), p.18.

31 Dennis W. Jeffers, "Service Journalism in the Association Magazine: A Case Study of the *Angus Journal*," paper presented at the AEJMC annual national meeting, Portland, Oregon. 1988.

32 Dennis W. Jeffers, "Magazine Educators and Consider 'Service Journalism' Orientation," *Journalism Educator*, vol. 45, 1990, p. 47-50.

suffered such disorders? Or is it on presenting messages that may motivate sufferers to do something about their problems?

Hypotheses:

Based on information found on eating disorders, Lemert's ideas of MM and MI and the concept of service journalism, this paper has postulated these hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: MI will be at the end of articles, in boxes, or highlighted by a screen, rather than throughout the article.

Hypothesis 2: Fewer articles will contain MI; MM will be found widely.

Hypothesis 3: Based on Milbrath's idea (found in Lemert) that new information creates the most dramatic attitude change, more articles in the young women's magazines will present MI than those in magazines with older target audiences. Most of the preventive material found in young women's magazines about eating disorders takes the form of MM. Because of the magnitude of the disorders and the increased attention to them, articles' texts are used to motivate possible sufferers to seek help.

Methodology:

The method used for this study is content analysis. Articles were located from *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, Infotrac, and the electronic Magazine Index. All were from the decade of the 1980s.

Although not a new phenomenon, eating disorders have been spotlighted recently. The time period of the last decade was selected because it is directly related to the coverage of eating disorders itself.[33] Moreover, if it is true that a disease such as bulimia is "the

[33] *Newsweek*, for example, said 1981 was the year of the binge/purge syndrome. See Judith Adler, "Looking Back at '81," *Newsweek*, January 1982, pp. 26-52.

women's psychological disease of our time," some segment of "our time" needs to be examined.[34] This particular segment of time was chosen because a span of 10 years should provide an appropriate representative sample, right up to the present.

Articles examined all appeared in women's magazines available at newsstands and supermarket reading racks, as well as through subscription. Women's magazines were picked because eating disorders occur most frequently in female adolescents and young adults.[35] Another consideration was that of the magazines' easy availability and large circulations.

The unit of measurement was the whole article. Articles found appeared in *Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Good Housekeeping, Harper's Bazaar, Ladies' Home Journal, Mademoiselle, McCall's, MS, New Woman, Savvy, Seventeen, Teen, Vogue, and Woman's Day.* Each article was examined for form, emphasis, key words or phrases, bold print, boxes, or highlighted areas. All were taken into account to determine if the article simply presented facts or included motivating material. After examining each article for its existence as MM, this researcher analyzed each for MI. If such information was present, the article was classified under one of the three types proposed by Lemert.

Results and Discussion:

According to the three library sources used to locate material for this study, 51 articles were published about eating disorders in popular women's magazines during the decade of the eighties. Of those 51, 12 were located in young women's magazines (YW), and 39 were located in magazines with older target audiences (W). One article

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[34]Crandall, *op. cit.*, p. 588.

[35] Swift, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

was reprinted from The New York Times Co., while another four were book excerpts.

To qualify as MM, the article examined had to present an obvious point of view, plus motivational/participatory messages. The message present in the articles was that eating disorders are detrimental to both physical and mental health. Most articles carried MM, 45 articles or 88.24%. Fewer than half the articles examined included MI material, 24 articles or 47.22%. One-hundred percent of the 10 YW articles or 83% that qualified as MM contained MI, and 14 articles or 36% of the articles that qualified as MM contained MIin the W category. However, of the 14, 10 consisted of boxed or highlighted information, or in one case MI ran on a screen across the bottom of two pages. Only four were integrated into the article, preceded with a subhead indicating MI would follow.[36] Thus, hypothesis one, stating MI would take the form of boxed, highlighted information at the end of articles, was supported. On the results for each hypothesis, a chi square one-sample test was performed, with one degree of freedom. The formula used was

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

The motivational messages in the 45 articles or 88.23% took various forms;
often advice appeared but was sometimes too general: This kind of article simply stated that help was available from aid societies throughout the country, which provide support. No specifics were given. Many places, in fact, offer weekly group-therapy programs and lecture series for people with eating disorders and their families; yet again, no specifics were given. The same is true of the reported

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[36] Surprisingly, to the author, pages were ripped from bound volumes. Invariably, the pages were the last pages of the articles, those who lists of resources--books, clinics, places to write to find an experienced therapist. This occurred in all ten cases, necessitating trips to several community libraries to obtain a copy of each whole piece.

fact that many networks and self-help groups have been established throughout the country. (p-.01) (*df* =1)

The mobilizing information stressed that sufferers are not alone, that help is available, and specifics were given. Three articles or 5.88% had tips or preventive strategies, but more, 11 or 21.57%, were concerned with telling the warning signs so as to recognize someone with an eating disorder. Nine articles cited or recommended books; one gave a hotline number for eating disorders which goes to a treatment program in a hospital. Nine articles carried information about doctors experienced in treating disorders, while 14 reported on treatment clinics or quoted from their doctors. Two articles gave only one place for readers to turn, an association in Illinois that uses cognitive behavioral therapy exclusively.[37] Numbers here add up to more than 24 because articles carried multiple MI messages.

A specific motivational technique was the use of the word "you." By using this word, the message directed itself to the reader, achieving an inclusive tone, more likely to motivate participation than an article written in the third person.

Of the 24 articles located using MM and MI (two used MI without MM), 19 were **identificational** and 5 were **tactical. No locational** MI appeared. Hypothesis 2, stating that fewer magazine articles would contain MI although MM would be found frequently, was supported. Thus, names and sufficient identification for readers to make contact, plus tips or techniques and explicit and implicit behavior models appeared. for example, the presentation of warning signs and symptoms to look for. Because the magazines are bought at any time or the month at newsstands and checkout counters throughout the country. it is unlikely that an author would present calendar information that makes up Locational MI. Such information

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37 This researcher found giving this sole source both limiting and unconscionable.

becomes outdated quickly, and locations are not easily accessible from all over the country.

The type of Tactical MI found in articles constituted tips, in paragraph form. Because of the fragile and emotional nature of eating disorders and the individuality of potential cases, writers are likely to be reluctant to offer detailed advice or "behavior models"--tasks better left to experts. Such tips include: heed the signs, focus on unhappiness as the reason one could benefit from help, talk to someone about your own emotions, don't deal with it alone. Such pose no immediate threat to the reader.

On the other hand, some preventive strategies contained more specific techniques: making specific behavioral recommendations for change, such as increasing the regularity of meals, eating a greater variety of foods, delaying the impulse to purge as long as possible, eating favorite foods in new settings not associated with binges, using relaxation tapes to control tension. Others are breaking eating patterns and rituals by, for instance, food shopping and meal planning in advance, ensuring one does not eat alone--most women will not binge or purge in the presence of others, participating in structured activities after meals to keep one away from the bathroom.

Based on research cited above, a correlation exists between the newness of a topic and the achievement of "dramatic attitude change." It was hypothesized that because the YW articles reach women at a younger age, they will contain more MI than the W magazines. Formats and types of information presented differ from that of audiences with older target audiences. Of the articles examined, 10 from YW magazines and 9 from W magazines contain MM and MI. The third hypothesis was supported. ($p<.05$, $df=1$)

Although the rest of the articles did present the attitude that eating disorders are detrimental, the participatory messages were missing.

Those that did not qualify as MM break down into three general categories:

First, biographical/autobiographical accounts that say "this is what happened to her/me."[38] Six articles or 11.67% fell into this category. Then, "news update" style, which only presented facts. Nine articles or 17.65% fell into this category. Finally, comedic pieces that satirize the obsession with being thin. One article or 2% fell into this category. A fundamental problem many of the articles in these categories have is that while they present a point of view, they do not present the idea that readers should act on such attitudes.

Lemert presents three reasons journalists do not include MI in their articles.[39] Although he does not apply these reasons to MM, they are useful in analyzing the number of articles that take this form. The first reason is that of "partisanship," in Lemert's term. Writers believe that presenting MI is an act of endorsement. Thus, such an act of partisanship directly contradicts what many reporters/writers consider their first rule of journalism, the quest for objectivity. Therefore, rather than risk breaking this rule, they omit MI altogether.

Secondly, Lemert finds writers withhold MI because of "dull detail." A summary of facts becomes more important than the facts themselves.[40] The writer abandons MI, then, for a general overview of the subject. Jeffers echoes the idea of "dull detail," urging journalism educators to stress the importance of "service"

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38 The lengthiest was from Cherry Boone O'Neil, oldest daughter of singer Pat Boone, who ends her story in *McCall's*. with the birth of her daughter. An article in *People* on her--highlighting the celebrity angle--was certainly a motive for the *McCall's* piece. It ran more than 6,300 words, but contained no MM or MI.

39 Lemert, *Does Mass Communication Change Public Opinion After All?* , *op. cit.*, pp. 133-139.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

articles. However, he acknowledges that this is easier said than done. "Writing service articles takes a great deal of research and planning (which takes time) and may not be perceived....as being as much fun as writing human interest articles."[41]

Thirdly, withholding MI comes about from a concept Lemert calls "issue-centeredness." Generally, this idea "implies a greater concern with describing and analyzing public issues rather than with what people can do about these issues."[42] This concept is divided further, into (1) "elitist concern," in which the writer assumes that he/she has a special target audience who already knows about the subject and thus can act without information to guide them; and (2) "mistaking words for deeds," in which the writer confuses informing or educating the audience with informing them about how to do something with the information and attitudes they have acquired.

Issue-centeredness figures prominently in the articles that lack MM material. Although Lemert uses this concept in relation to MI, it applies to MM as well. The first subtype, "elitist concern," applies to writers and editors of women's magazines, who have a relatively well-educated, middle- to upper-class group of readers. Magazine staffers may believe that readers already know about eating disorders and can infer from the material that they should take action without actually being told to do so.

As for the second subtype, "mistaking words for deeds," a writer may think that motivational messages appear in articles, but he/she is simply presenting facts and ideas. A clear distinction between the two types of material is not realized. For instance, a total of 48 articles or 94.12% in magazines had sources, indicating where to get help without recommending anyone. Such articles quoted, for

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41 Jeffers, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

42 Lemert,*Does Mass Communication Change Public Opinion After All? , op. cit.*, p. 138.

example, a professor of psychiatry at a specific medical school or people from various clinics. However, readers probably recognize that such sources were selected by the writers from a wide array and, therefore, come recommended indirectly.

Missing Articles:

The researcher was surprised with the sparsity of articles found on the topic for the last decade. The lack of articles may or may not be the result of a deliberate effort. It may stem from a confusion on the part of both writers and editors who make content-related decisions about what the material is really saying to readers. Editors have said they do not want to publish any material that makes readers feel guilty or depressed; everything should be upbeat.[43]

Editors often peer through a frame of what articles they assign in terms of how many readers will care. The common perception is that eating disorders affect only those who are young and upwardly mobile and upper-middle class (yuppies-to-be); therefore, it makes sense that *Seventeen* and *Teen* would run so many articles compared to most magazines for older women. Also, *MS.* would run many because of the feminist theory-angle. (However, research suggests the popular conception is no longer valid.) Women editors may also feel stigmatized; after all, eating disorders is unattractive behavior. The disorders often come from response to stress, and

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[43] A recent meeting of the American Society of Journalists and Authors in New York found the editor of *Woman's World* saying this, for instance. Also, *Redbook's* editors have said this to some freelance writers. Neither ran any articles on eating disorders during the last decade. *Cosmopolitan*, only lightly connected with reality, ran one. One freelance writer had a parallel experience with *Woman's Day* and the subject of alcoholism. She was told it was a depressing subject and not enough readers were likely to be alcoholics. The writer turned the proposal into one about people with a drinking problem or involved in a relationship with a person with a drinking problem--and got the assignment. Another time she wanted to write about what mothers should do when daughters approach menstruation and was told not enough readers would be interested or affected by it.

some editors fit the profile--so denial may be operating.[44] The editors would not want to bring up the subject or push it because they would not want their colleagues to consider that they had an eating disorder.[45]

Another possibility has to do with an editor's biases and prejudices.[46] Simple eccentricities have meant opposition to articles of a hard-hitting or controversial nature. In addition, some free-lance writers who believe magazines don't treat issues affecting women seriously. The hazards to women on smoking as well as the dangers posed by alcoholism have been ignored in most women's magazines for decades.

Basically, this has existed because of the possible clash with advertisers. One writer of a medical column for a woman's magazine tested the limits of anti-smoking articles and was refused repeatedly. However, as a result of an article in *Columbia Journalism Review* on how dangerous cigarettes were, yet how terrible they were not forthrightly condemned in women's magazines, it was all right to write anti-smoking columns for a while. The magazine rapidly backed off when the advertisers began to complain.[47]

Still another possibility involves the clash with other editorial content. Women's magazines have long considered the article about

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[44] This insight came from Kay Klotzberg, Ph.D., who has a clinical practice in New York. She is going to propose an article on eating disorders soon to editors. A follow-up interview would be worthwhile.

[45] One freelance writer found scales in restrooms of women's magazines, so that women could weigh themselves at work. Lazier-Smith interview, *op. cit.*

[46] The well-known editor of a Conde Nast magazine for women will not run anything about adoption, for example; her daughter is adopted. Thus, despite adopted children wanting to find their birth mothers--a controversial but very real subject in the last decade--nothing appears, and she routinely has boycotted all proposals from freelancers who have tried.

[47] Interview, Flora Davis, Princeton, March 1990.

dieting, usually with a diet, a staple. In fact, in a survey of the 15 top-selling women's magazines, one researcher found 63 cover blurbs about diet.[48]

On the other hand, *Glamour* admitted its 1979 article "Full Stomachs and Empty Lives," produced a "startling" reaction.[49] The magazine did a follow-up editorial and said the volume of mail and the "desperate tone" of many letters were surprising. The magazine claimed that their article began a national discussion of the problem, bulimarexia.

Summary and Conclusions:

The topic of eating disorders has gained increased national attention in this country in recent years. So much attention, in fact, that bulimia has been dubbed, "the women's psychological disease of our time."[50] Realizing this, women's popular consumer magazines appear to be presenting informational/educational material, but 51 articles over a 10-year period does not seem sufficient, given the enormity of the problem. Moreover, the problem with much of the material presented, is that not enough of it presents participatory messages or specific information upon which readers can act.

There is no agreement about "proper functions of the press," but one researcher finds crucial the contribution of the press to "public welfare."[51]

The question then arises of whether the presentation of such information is actually serving the "public welfare." If magazines are

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48 Lazier-Smith interview, *op. cit.* Some magazines carry more than one diet per issue, she said. This type of content is a "big seller" for them.

49 Marlene B. White and William White, "Bingeing and Purging: the pain, the hope--when thin is never thin enough," *Glamour*, May 1983, p. 258-265.

50 Crandall, *op. cit.*, p. 588.

51 Warren Breed, *The Newspaperman, News & Society* (Salem, N.H.: Ayer Co. Publishers, 1980), p. 14.

telling their readers what to think about through the agenda-setting process, the message arising from articles on eating disorders is that participation is secondary in importance to basic knowledge of concepts and facts.

However, does this mirror what readers really feel is important? According to Jeffers' study of the *Angus Journal*, readers prefer one kind of content over another, namely "service" content. That has the highest priority. It appears that magazine readers are making up their own minds about what is important and worth reading. Audience research and self-examination will enable magazines to clarify if Jeffers' points about reader preference are correct, if the appeal of service journalism should continue to grow.

Although limited to articles that cover only one topic, findings of this study make an important statement about magazines that appear to be presenting "service" material, particularly those for young women. Presentation of facts and basic information is indeed an important service to the public, but such discussion is insufficient. If magazines are to serve as "an inexpensive instructor in daily living," they need to include participatory messages and information to act on.[52] The link, therefore, between "service journalism" and "mobilizing messages" seems readily apparent. The latter is on sounder theoretical ground, given Lemert's work, and appears to be one way to operationalize the former term.

In any event, further research could investigate the predisposition of editors to this or other highly-charged subjects. Additionally, editors' attitudes about running articles with mobilizing information or service journalism bear investigation and systematic study. Measuring readers' retention and reaction to MI and MM presentations would begin to deal with the basics by examining what makes effective communication. Jeffers began this work with a

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[52] J.W. Click and Russell H. Baird, *Magazine Editing and Production*, third edition (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, 1983), p. 18.

trade magazine; it should be extended to consumer publications as well. The impact of advertising of editorial and maintaining editorial objectivity are other areas that merit continued examination.

ARTICLES ON EATING DISORDERS IN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES--THE EIGHTIES

YW:

Seventeen, Jan. 1982, Arlene Fischer, "Stuff Yourself, Starve Yourself"
Seventeen, July 1982, Kathy McCoy, "Are You Obsessed with Your Weight?"
Seventeen, July 1983, Neil Amdur, "Can an athlete take fitness to far?"
Seventeen, March 1986, Kathy McCoy, "Eating Problems and Sexuality: What's the Connection?"
Seventeen, Sept. 1986, Isabel Johnson, "Starving for Perfection: One Girl's Battle with Anorexia"
Seventeen, Sept. 1986, Anne Conover Heller, "Anorexia Update"
Seventeen, Nov. 1989, Leslie Morgan, "Why Are Girls Obsessed with Their Weight?"

Teen, July 1989, Elizabeth Karlsberg, "The big fat lie when thin does you in."
Teen, Aug. 1980, Anonymous, "Starving to death: One teen's diet nightmare"
Teen, June 1981, Jennifer Jason Leigh, "Playing a part she believes in."
Teen, April 1983, A. Mackey, "Bulimia: the diet danger"
Teen, Oct. 1986, M. Barbara Hogan, "The nightmare of disturbed eating"

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W:

Cosmopolitan, March 1989, Gail North, "Exercise, Bulimia"
Glamour, October 1981, Susan Squire, "Why Thousands of Women Don't Know how to Eat Normally Anymore."
Glamour, May 1983, Marlene Boskind-White and Wm.C. White, "Bingeing and Purging, the pain, the hope, when thin is never thin enough".
Glamour, March 1985, "You think a friend has an eating disorder--what should you do?
Glamour, October 1988, Amy Mereson, "New Treatments for Binge-Purge Sufferers"
Good Housekeeping, April 1982, MLS, Bulimia: The Secret Dieter's Disease"
Good Housekeeping, May 1982, "My Problem and How I Solved it; My Daughter was Starving herself to Death."
Harper's Bazaar, March 1982, "The Neurotic Personality: Are you Screwed Up? Bulimia: The New Danger in Dieting."
Harper's Bazaar, April 1988, Marilyn Webb, "Borderline Obsessions: Sex, Work Weight"
Ladies' Home Journal, November 1981, Kathryn Lance, "How to Control Binge Eating"
McCall's, August 1981, Marjorie Beth Stein, "The Eating Disorder Women Don't Talk About."
McCall's, November 1982, Cherry Boone O'Neill, "Starving for Attention"
McCall's, April 1985, Jane Pratt, "Why Women Starve and Binge"

Mlle, May 1981, Jennifer M. Kintzing, "What the Experts Say about Anorexia Nervosa."
Mlle, May 1981, Jennifer Woods, "I was starving myself to death"
Mlle, Dec 1982, Beth Rosen, "A Love-Hate Affair with My Body: the Story of a Food Addict"
Mlle, Oct. 1984, Susan Squire, "If You Think a Woman Can Never be Too Thin....Think Again"
Mlle, Oct. 1986, Lisa Rogak, "When Exercise Goes a Step too Far"
Mlle, March 1989, Johanna Schneller, "The Lust for Thin"
Mlle, July 1989, Sandra Bernhard, "You Can Be Too Thin"
Mlle, July 1989, Cynthia Hacinli, "Why You can-or-can't eat another bite"

MS, October, 1983, Susan Squire, "Is the Binge-Purge Cycle Catching?"

MS, October 1985, Pamela Erens, "Bodily Harm: Help for Women Trapped in the Binge-Purge Cycle"

MS, November 1986, Ann Hornaday, "The Body in the Mind's Eye and Other News About Looks"
MS, February 1987, Ann Hornaday, "News Focus: Where to get Help (treatment, organizations, books)"
MS, February 1987, Linsy Van Gelder, "Patterns of Addiction"
MS, February 1987, Linsy Van Gelder, "I looked like someone from Auschwitz"
MS, February, 1987, "The 'right size' for women has been decreasing yearly."

MS, May 1987, Deborah Marquandt, "A Thinly Disguised Message"
MS, February 1987, "Cross Addiction Surpring Results of the MS Survey"
New Woman, Sept. 1986, Catherine Houck, "Eating Disorders"
New Woman, Dec. 1987, Richard B. Stuart and Barbara Jacobson, "Is Marriage Making You Fat?"
New Woman, July 1988, Joan Rattner Heilman, "Sick of Dieting? Try a New Approach."
New Woman, May 1988, Caroline Adams Miller, "Dying to Be Thin"
New Woman, Nov. 1989, Jane R. Hirschmann and Carol H. Munter, "Feeling Fat: Is it an Emotional Issue?"
Savvy, May 1988
Vogue, August 1984, Carol Tavris, "Bulimia---New Treatments that Work"
Working Woman, Sept. 1989, Roberta Israeloff, "Family, Food and Fitness"
Working Woman, Arlene Fischer, "Do You Stuff Yourself One Moment and Starve Yourself the Next?" What you should know about bulimia, the binge-purge eating disorder"

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